

Bureau of Land Management Ecoregional Assessment and Implementation**San Stiver Interview****June 14 2010****GREATER SAGE GROUSE INITIATIVE**

He is currently the WAFWA SG coordinator. He worked for 25 years on state-wide SG assessment and strategy in Nevada. He worked for the last 7 years on the entire range – which includes 11 states and 2 provinces. He was also one of the authors of the SG assessment and conservation strategy.

How and why of landscape-scale assessments and planning

WAFWA started the whole range-wide assessment and conservation strategy 7-8 years ago. In 2003, the BLM, USFS, WAFWA, and USFWS generated an assessment and strategy. But they have been building out the whole collaborative over about 15 years. They started in about 1995, and the first 5 years, they focused on developing action plans for SG. They saw the need for a coordinated effort to manage the species. Greatest impetus was the threat of listing the species. They teamed with the Uof Montana.

The overall structure of the Greater Sage Grouse Initiative is comprised of 6 federal agencies (BLM, USFS, USFWS, USGS, NRCS, Farm Service) and 11 state and 2 provinces. There is an Executive Oversight Committee and a technical group made up of representatives from each of the agencies/entities. The Executive Committee makes a determination on which field projects will be funded based on recommendations by the technical group. Each federal agency has different funding pipelines. They can pool their funds, or use them through their own channels. The group is still trying to answer how to fund the whole process. The BLM has \$24 million distributed through state office and NRCS has \$27 million, which they spread throughout the West. They want to move into a more focused process.

SCALE:

The team developed 4 scales roughly based on scales identified by Johnson.

- 1) Roughly 250,000 sq. miles – full range of sage brush habitat
- 2) Roughly 100,000 sq. miles – across populations
- 3) Roughly 20,000 acres - part of the range – such as summer and winter range
- 4) Actual small on-the-ground populations – where the birds are.

They developed different questions for the different scales.

- 1) Questions on policy direction - Major goals – such as do you want to protect this species or not?
- 2) Critical questions about the distinct populations. Which populations are there? How do they interact? What is the genetic flow? What is the connectivity between populations?
- 3) Distinguishing priority areas. What pieces of habitat are best for improvement? Which populations can be influenced to improve numbers?

- 4) Project level concerns. How tall is the vegetation for bird nesting? What is the ground composition? What is the grazing rotation – and how many cows will be on the ground per day? What kind of seeding and when is the best time for seeding?

They looked at the entire range, and when they started looking at populations and management issues, it kind of naturally broke up into management zones that share similar populations and management issues. The WAFWA framework team came up with about 60 populations, which kind of bunched themselves together around floristic provinces. These areas corresponded to the Kuchner ecoregions and the TNC's regions – which identified similar challenges and issues. For example, the BLM ID Jarbridge Field Office and Ranger District was designated as SG management zone 4. It was comprised of roughly 1 million acres across 2 states, with 2 wildlife agencies and 2 NRCS offices. In this area, the potential for habitat improvement is significant, and the potential to improve the numbers is great. The intent was to have people in industry and land management come together to see what they could do to improve habitat and increase numbers across the range.

In the past, the agencies had practiced random acts of environmental kindness. The BLM as the lead agency worked with partners range-wide. The idea was to scale the assessment down into coordinated management strategies.

ROLE OF SCIENTISTS/MANAGERS/RESOURCE SPECIALISTS

Most of the original work was pulled from publication literature and experience of the individuals on the team who had management experience on the ground. They tried to involve the scientists all the way down to managers. They had a couple of face-to-face meetings with an interagency group of mid-level managers, where they sat down in the same room to talk about the conceptual framework. They identified key questions, talked about their management needs, and then the core group drafted the document.

The biggest concern was with the limited amount of resources and the distribution of resources across the agency. There were critical resources that were not connected with each other, so there was no synergy between conservation actions. The conservation strategy outlines a strategic allocation of budgets and resources based on the need of the bird.

When they first started the process, each of the decision-makers didn't really see how they fit in the overall picture. So the individual team members would talk to them at the scale at which they were working. They also provided a decision support framework in the document.

The core group of people who produced the assessment and conservation strategy was not assigned to this full time. It was additional task as assigned. San took on the task of editing the document, sections of which had been written by individual members of the team. It was originally 350 pages – which was too big and technical to be a practical guide. He edited it down to a useful form.

Developing the SG assessment and conservation strategy was an iterative process. After the team drafted the assessment and conservation strategy paper, it went up the chain to the BLM ID state

office, which circulated it broadly through the BLM and FWS agencies. They took the feedback from the agencies and revised the draft. After it was completed, the BLM sent it out for peer reviews – it was not a totally neutral process, but they picked reviewers outside the drafting process who were renowned in the field.

ROLE OF THE PUBLIC

The agencies worked with various local collaborative groups, such as the Elko City Stewardship Group and the Sturbridge Working Group to develop grazing systems and identify how to work together to address sage grouse habitat. The ranchers were motivated to partner on this project because they didn't want to see the SG listed. Also, they realized that it was in their interest to support the conservation strategy. At a meeting in around 2000, a cowboy stood up and said he had read through the conservation strategy, and he liked what he saw because "good sage grouse habitat is good cow habitat." The ranchers were interested in any opportunity to make the range land better, more productive and sustainable.

Translating assessment and planning process into day-to-day management

ROLE OF SCIENTISTS/MANAGERS/RESOURCE SPECIALISTS

The draft conservation strategy is within hours of being a final draft. Some places are using pieces of it in management already.

The conservation strategy provides managers and policy makers with options based on their questions and decisions. The document moves from the 30,000 ft. level to the 100,000 ft. level – with some yes or no question frameworks. The scale and type of decisions emerged from the discussions – both in the group and with individual managers throughout the process.

The Murphy Complex fire in 2006 put all the agencies in a pickle to work together. The Burned Area Rehab (BAER) plans provided the foundation for interagency on-the-ground work. It was a model for landscape management across jurisdictions. In this example, there was 1 large population within multiple seasonal ranges. They developed 2 plans that focus on SG. The BLM did a single plan which identified where they needed to put plans on the ground for SG. There was also a unit plan developed by groups of private lands owners who came together to see how to integrate with the BLM range management plan. They developed their own plan to be consistent with the agencies.

The post BAER plan (recovery/restoration?) will set the stage for maintaining ecological stability – and the assessment provided the framework for restoration. They are currently in the process of doing additional mapping to look at biological potential. The assessment values generated by the ecoregional values assessment will help. Dealing with BLM and state offices, the group gathered a variety of input into the mapping process. It resulted in the ecoregional values assessment, which was complex but useable. All groups provided input. The states took a closer look at the particular zones within their boundaries to give input.

ROLE OF THE PUBLIC:

The agencies worked with various local collaborative groups, such as the Elko City Stewardship Group and the Sturbridge Working Group throughout the process, but these landowners were key players in the development of the post BAER plan collaborative management effort.

What worked and didn't work??

What worked well:

- *Forced collaboration. We put people in a room and said "here's the problem." Once you walk in somebody else's shoes, you see solutions. We sat down in a room and said, "We have a problem. From my position, X occurs, and from my position, Y occurs."*
- *In some meetings, the scientists worked together to write the assessments. They hashed everything out- and created a pretty cohesive vision.*

What didn't work:

- *The pitfalls are in the political arena. State governors can be very challenging. The biology is fairly reasonable.*

Lessons Learned – What would you do next time?

- Provide more support and compensation for the public to remain involved. It is hard for them to maintain connection when meetings are in different places, and they have to take a day off and travel to get to the meetings. They have to attend on their own time and their own dime.
- It is important to have coordinators and people to build capacity to do things. People will have to be assigned to build capacity.
- You need to assign at least a few people full time to these projects. It is hard to continue this level of work when people are only assigned part-time or on top of everything else.

Key Assumptions

Assumption		True	False	Explanation
ECOREGIONAL ASSESMENTS must be:				
1.	Focused on key questions			Yes .
2.	Grounded in conceptual models linking key attributes and change agents			Absolutely. You need to identify this through the BLM ecoregional assessments.
3.	Focused on synthesizing existing information not on collecting new information or on conducting research			Yes.
4.	Transparent			False – with a caveat. Maybe from a macro level, but it is difficult to determine which activity is which – it all gets lost in the documents and process of providing information. The scientists are really put to the test (working hard just to produce the document.)
5.	Approached as an ongoing process not as a one-time ad hoc effort (regions and units of analysis must be systematically defined, data must be managed)			This remains to be seen. It should be used to prioritize conservation efforts – it is applied through management and maps where you identify the opportunities and challenges.
6.	Scaled to address landscape issues but not too large to be politically unmanageable			Yes – but you still have to deal with jurisdictional boundaries and political issues. It should be politically, but the practicality of doing thing across jurisdictional boundaries is that you're still not going to use UT dollars in NV. You can kind of use BLM money on USFS or private lands maybe, but not state dollars in a different state. The federal support is important for that. About 70% of the lands are federal across the full range.
7.	Informative not			Correct – but with options.

Assumption		True	False	Explanation
	decisional			
8.	Other			
ECOREGIONAL DIRECTION must be:				
9.	Developed through an iterative process involving multiple organizational levels Developed through a collaborative process to the extent cross-jurisdictional action is required			Not enough information to answer because we never went out and did scoping. (They did use an iterative process with assessment and conservation strategy.) Yes – this was a major focus.
10.	Consistent with the public disclosure, public participation, and interagency coordination requirements associated with planning and environmental impact assessments			Habitat assessment – not necessarily Involve folks at the local level at the front end- in the assessment process – and then continue through the NEPA process.
11.	Grounded in agency mission and authority			Yes – a good grounding.
12.	Built on existing agency work processes such as land use planning, use authorization, budgeting, and project design and implementation			We worked on that. Attempt to adaptively manage the process. We have all the people who can make those adjustments in the room together so we can keep it within policy and statutory authority.

Assumption		True	False	Explanation
13.	Other			
MANAGEMENT must have the opportunity to:				
14.	Identify the key management questions the assessment will answer			Yes – identify the management questions. The assessment will provide answers where it can, and it will identify gaps.
15.	Participate in critical decision points during the assessment process and in the development of ecoregional direction			The folks making decisions – must use a decision process incorporated in at their scale. For example, at the higher level, policy makers need to make the decision that they will work. At a project level, there will be a different set of decisions that will have to be made.
16.	Other			
FIELD RESOURCE specialists must have the opportunity to:				
17.	Validate and supplement the assessment information with finer-scaled local information			The habitat assessment framework does this. Mike Wisdom and USGS set up feedback loops to validate information. Habitat – adaptive management at the lower scale.
18.	Help define how assessment information may be used in day to day management activities			Day-to-day is only one scale. They need to provide information. But some of those things are seasonal (grazing cows). You have to have them be more active using the assessment so they can give feedback. A range con can report to his supervisor what is working and not working. It will be reported out to the working group.
19.	Other			
PARTNERS must have the opportunity to:				
20.	Help identify the key management questions the assessment will			Yes. This is part of the SG management zone team concept. Talk about management questions with the public and the agencies.

Assumption		True	False	Explanation
	answer			
21.	See their work incorporated into the assessment where appropriate			They have to actually work on it. They help implement the conservation actions. For example, put out deflectors on fences.
22.	Help develop ecoregional direction			They have to actually work on it. They help implement the conservation actions. For example, put out deflectors on fences.
23.	Other			
<i>What other suggestions do you have for an effective process and use</i>				
24.				You have to use forced collaboration through the line officers and chain of command. The project is driven by a bigger vision – it is tactical and strategic.
25.				

